

## AUGUSTINE ON THE INTERRELATIONS OF THE GOSPELS

In a contribution to the recent Jerusalem symposium on *The Interrelations of the Gospels*, Frans Neirynck makes mention of the "Augustinian hypothesis" concerning the literary relationships between the Gospels<sup>1</sup>. According to Neirynck, Augustine's view of these relationships was that Mark had access to Matthew, and Luke to Mark. Neirynck illustrates Augustine's position with the following diagram:

$$\text{Mt} \rightarrow \text{Mk} \rightarrow \text{Lk}$$

It deserves to be pointed out at the outset that this presentation of Augustine's "hypothesis" is not entirely self-evident. In fact, Augustine has often been said to have held the view that each succeeding evangelist made use of the work of *all* his predecessors (in the case of Mark: of his only predecessor, Matthew)<sup>2</sup>. Since Augustine believed that the evangelists had written in the order Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, he would have held that Mark made use of Matthew, Luke of Mark and Matthew, and John of Mark, Matthew and Luke.

In a paper read at the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense of 1990, however, I have already argued that if Augustine had a "Benutzungshypothese" at all, it can only have had the following form<sup>3</sup>:

$$\text{Mt} \rightarrow \text{Mk} \rightarrow \text{Lk} \rightarrow \text{Jn}$$

The reason why Augustine should not be thought to have regarded each evangelist as dependent on *all* his predecessors is that he, Augustine, wrote in *De consensu evangelistarum* I,ii,4: "each evangelist proves

1. F. NEIRYNCK, *The Two-Source Hypothesis*, in D.L. DUNGAN (ed.), *The Interrelations of the Gospels* (BETL, 95), Leuven, University Press - Peeters, 1990, pp. 3-22, esp. p. 19.

[Editor's note: The phrase "According to Neirynck" could suggest a less correct understanding of Neirynck's reference to the Augustinian hypothesis (p. 19). It is first mentioned in the opening passage of his paper (p. 4) and there he significantly uses quotation marks: the "Augustinian" hypothesis (Mt-Mk-Lk). See below, n. 22.]

2. See, e.g., H. MERKEL, *Die Widersprüche zwischen den Evangelien: Ihre polemische und apologetische Behandlung in der Alten Kirche bis zu Augustin* (WUNT, 13), Tübingen, Mohr, 1971, p. 229: "In dieser durch Augenzeugenschaft und Inspiration nach jeder Richtung gesicherten Atmosphäre wirkt es fast etwas überraschend, dass Augustin die Meinung äussert, die Evangelisten hätten die Werke ihrer Vorgänger [*sic*: plural] eingesehen: ...".

3. H.J. DE JONGE, *The Loss of Faith in the Historicity of the Gospels*, in A. DENAUX (ed.), *John and the Synoptics* (BETL, 101), Leuven, University Press - Peeters, 1992, 409-421.

to have chosen to write *not* in ignorance of the other writer, his predecessor [in the singular!]"<sup>4</sup>. To the list of authors who have taken the singular of "the other writer, his predecessor" in this passage seriously, we can now add not only Bernhard Weiss<sup>5</sup>, but also Frans Neirynck<sup>6</sup>.

However, as I indicated already in 1990, it is doubtful whether Augustine assumed any literary interdependence between the Gospels at all. For the way in which he speaks about the relationships between the Gospels elsewhere in his *De consensu evangelistarum* contradicts the literary-critical theory just mentioned so often that Augustine can hardly be supposed to have held it.

If it is assumed that Matthew was the source of Mark, Mark of Luke, and Luke of John, certain literary-critical assertions on the relationships between the Gospels are *eo ipso* impossible. Such impossible assertions are, for instance, "Mt, Mk and Lk omit material occurring in Jn", and "Mk omits certain matters set forth in Lk", and "Mt omits certain facts included in Mk". Such statements, however, abound in Augustine's *De consensu evangelistarum*. Some examples may be quoted here.

*1. Mt, Mk and Lk are said to have omitted facts narrated by Jn*

II,xvii,34 (on John's account of the calling of Peter, Andrew, Philip and Nathanael and the turning of water into wine at Cana): "All these incidents [narrated by Jn] are left out by the other evangelists [the synoptics]"<sup>7</sup>. Latin: "Quae omnia ceteri evangelistae [synoptici] praetermiserunt"<sup>8</sup>.

II,xviii,42 (on Jesus' first advent in Galilee, related by John): "We may gather ... that these three evangelists [the synoptics] ... have left out the Lord's first advent in Galilee after his baptism". Latin: "Unde intellegitur hos tres evangelistas ... praetermisisse primum domini aduentum in Galilaeam, posteaquam baptizatus est"<sup>9</sup>.

II,xlvi,96 (on Jesus' words in Jn 6,5 "Where are we to buy bread to feed

4 AUGUSTINUS, *De consensu evangelistarum*, ed F WEHRICH (CSEL, 43), Vienna/Leipzig, Tempusky and Freytag, 1904, p 4, I,ii,4 "non tamen unusquisque eorum velut alterius praecedentis [singular!] ignarus voluisse scribere reperitur"

5 B WEISS, *Lehrbuch der Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Berlin, Hertz, 1886, p 473 "Dagegen setzt Augustin ganz unbefangen voraus, dass jeder Evangelist das Werk seines Vorgangers gekannt habe, und da man die überlieferte Reihenfolge zugleich für die Zeitfolge ihrer Entstehung hielt, so war ihm Marcus der *pedissequus et brevior Matthaei* (*de consensu evang* 1,4)"

6 See note 1

7 I will use and adapt the translation by S D F SALMOND, in P SCHAFF (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol VI, <sup>1</sup>1888, reprint Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1980, pp 71-236

8 WEHRICH (n 4), p 135

9 *Ibid*, p 142

these people?"): "We are to suppose, therefore, that ... the Lord ... spoke to Philip in the terms which John records, but which those others [the synoptics] have omitted". Latin: "Intellegitur ergo ... dominum ... dixisse Philipppo quod Iohannes commemorat, isti autem praetermiserunt"<sup>10</sup>.

*2. Mt and Mk are said to "join" Lk at a certain point by giving the same story*

II,lxiv,124 (on Lk 18,35) "[Mt and Mk], after having inserted these passages, joined him [Lk] at the point where he reports the incident at Jericho". Latin: "Post quae interposita occurrerunt [sc. Mt et Mc] ei [sc. Lucae] ad Hierichum"<sup>11</sup>.

*3. Mt and Mk are said to skip certain matters occurring in Lk*

II,lxvi,127 (on the story of Zacchaeus and some parables in Lk): "Luke, on the other hand, tarries a space by Jericho, recounting certain matters which these others have omitted, – namely the story of Zacchaeus, the chief of the publicans, and some sayings which are couched in parabolic form". Latin: "Lucas autem in Hiericho immoratur, quaedam commemorans quae isti [Mt et Mc] praetermiserunt de Zaccheo principe publicanorum et quaedam in parabolis dicta"<sup>12</sup>.

*4. Mt is said to have left out material occurring in Mk*

II,xxvii,61 (on Mk 2,16 "He eats and drinks with tax-collectors"): "Matthew has omitted one thing which Mark inserts – namely, the addition 'and drinks'". Latin: "Praetermissum est ergo a Matthaeo quod iste [Mc] addidit 'bibit'"<sup>13</sup>.

II,xlvi,96 (on Mk 6,38 "How many loaves have you?") "The expression which the same Mark relates to have been used by the Lord, namely, 'How many loaves have you?' has been passed by without notice by the rest". Latin: "Quod autem commemorat idem Marcus dixisse dominum: quot panes habetis? praetermiserunt ceteri"<sup>14</sup>.

II,lxviii,131 (on Mk 11,15a.19-20): "Matthew ... has omitted certain facts which Mark has related, namely, his [Jesus] coming into the city and his going out of it in the evening, and the astonishment which the

10. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 227. In II,lxvi,127 it is Lk who is said to "join" Mt and Mk; see *ibid.*, p. 229; within the framework of the "Augustinian hypothesis" this is of course an acceptable assertion.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

disciples expressed at finding the tree dried up as they passed by in the morning” Latin “Matthaeus praetermisit ea quae Marcus commemorauit, venisse illum in civitatem et vespere exisse et mane, cum transirent, discipulos arborem aridam fuisse miratos”<sup>15</sup>

5 *Mk is said to have left out material given by Lk*

III,xxv,73 (on Lk 24,14-30, material omitted in Mk 16,12) “Moreover, to whom can it fail to be clear that Mark has just omitted certain matters which are fully set forth in Luke’s narrative, – that is to say, the subjects of the conversation which Jesus had with them before they recognised him, and the manner in which they came to know him in the breaking of the bread?” Latin “Cui autem non eluceat praetermisisse Marcum quae Lucas narrando explicauit? Hoc est, quae cum illis locutus fuerit Iesus, antequam agnoscerent eum, et quomodo eum in fractione panis agnouerint?”<sup>16</sup>

6 *Mt is said to have added something to the words of Jesus as reported by Mk and Lk*

II,lxxx,157 (on Mt 26,18 “to a certain man”) “Matthew has brought in the phrase ‘to a certain man’, as a brief explanation introduced by himself with the view of succinctly giving us to understand who the person referred to was. Matthew has inserted the statement that the Lord bade them go ‘to a certain man’, whereas Mark and Luke present this man as a certain definitely indicated individual. And thus it is that, after giving us the words actually spoken by the Lord himself, namely, ‘Go into the city’, he [Mt] has introduced this addition of his own, ‘to a certain man’” Latin “interposuit Matthaeus ‘ad quendam’ tamquam ex persona sua studio breuitatis illum compendio voluit insinuare ex sua persona interposuit ‘ad quendam’ iussisse dominum ut irent. Ac per hoc cum verba domini posuisset dicentis ‘ite in ciuitatem’, interposuit ipse [Mt] ‘ad quendam’”<sup>17</sup>

7 *Mt is said to have omitted material included in Lk*

II,xii,26 (on Lk 3,10-14, John the Baptist’s replies to questioners, omitted by Mt) “[Lk] brings in the question put by the multitudes as to what they should do, and represents John to have replied to them with a statement of good works as the fruits of repentance, – all of which is omitted by Matthew” Latin “Ille [Lc] interponit interrogatio-

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p 234

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p 373

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp 264-265

nem turbarum, quid facerent, et eis respondentem Iohannem de bonis operibus tamquam de fructibus paenitentiae, quod Mattheus omisit"<sup>18</sup>.

These examples make it sufficiently clear that when Augustine tried to explain the discrepancies between the Gospels, the so-called "Augustinian hypothesis" was not his point of departure. Had this been the case, he could not have argued, e.g., that "Matthew has omitted what Mark has related" (see sub 4 above).

Now it can of course rightly be observed that the terminology used by Augustine in the passages quoted above, such as *omittere*, *praetermittere*, *addere*, and *interponere*, is not meant in a technical, redaction-critical sense. It can be shown indeed that as a rule *omittere* and *praetermittere* in *De consensu evangelistarum* do not mean "leave out" a passage or a word from a given source, but "leave (something) unnoticed", "fail to narrate" something that is narrated in a parallel story. This can be seen from, e.g., II,v,15-16, where Augustine deals with the differences between the birth stories in Mt 2 and Lk 2. He observes that Mt 2,1-12 is omitted by Luke: "hoc totum Lucas praetermisit", just as Matthew fails to mention several important events mentioned by Luke, as, for instance, that the Lord was laid in a manger, that an angel announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds, the song of the angels, the circumcision, Simeon and Anna, etcetera: "Mattheus non narrauit quod Lucas narrat" (II,v,15), and "Mattheus praetermittit" what Luke relates (II,v,16). Obviously, "praetermittere" is synonymous with "non narrare". Elsewhere Augustine uses the transitive verb "tacere (aliquid)" as a synonym (e.g., II,xlv,94 twice; II,il,103).

That Augustine's phrases *omittere*, *praetermittere*, *addere*, and *interponere* should not be taken as technical terms can also be seen from the fact that in his *De consensu evangelistarum* each of the four evangelists can be said to have "added" or "omitted" something in comparison with *any other* evangelist. Augustine simply ignores the (evidently modern) principle according to which an author can only be said to add something to, or to omit something from, his own direct source. In Augustine's view each evangelist can be said to insert, to leave out, or to skip something in comparison with the account of any other evangelist. In the stories of Jesus' birth, for instance, Matthew is said to have left out the events related only by Luke, whereas Luke is said to have left out the events related only by Matthew.

From a modern redaction-critical or literary-critical point of view, then, Augustine's phraseology for describing differences in length between the texts of different Gospels is naive, untechnical and imprecise.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

Consequently, the passages of *De consensu evangelistarum* quoted above under nos. 1 to 7 cannot be taken as statements of a literary-critical import, nor as detracting from the validity of the "Augustinian hypothesis" if this theory is otherwise well-founded.

However, the so-called "Augustinian hypothesis" has no other basis than *De consensu evangelistarum* I,ii,4:

"... and although each of the evangelists may appear to have kept a certain order of narration proper to himself, yet each individual evangelist proves to have chosen to write *not* as if he was ignorant of the other writer, that is, his predecessor. And if any evangelist leaves out material included in another evangelist, he cannot be said to have done so out of ignorance. ... For Matthew is understood to have taken it in hand to construct the record of the incarnation of the Lord ... Mark seems to have followed him closely like his attendant and epitomizer. For in his narrative he gives nothing in concert with John apart from the others: by himself separately, he has little to record; in conjunction with Luke, as distinguished from the rest, he has still less; but in concord with Matthew, he has a very large number of passages. Much, too, he narrates in words almost numerically and identically the same as those used by Matthew, where the agreement is either with that evangelist alone, or with him in connection with the rest".

"... et quamvis singuli suum quendam narrandi ordinem tenuisse videantur, non tamen unusquisque eorum velut alterius praecedentis ignarus voluisse scribere repperitur vel ignorata praetermisisse, quae scripsisse alius inuenitur. ... Nam Mattheus suscepisse intellegitur incarnationem domini ... Marcus eum subsecutus tamquam pedisequus et breuiator eius videtur. Cum solo quippe Iohanne nihil dixit, solus ipse perpauca, cum solo Luca pauciora, cum Mattheo vero plurima et multa paene totidem atque ipsis verbis sine cum solo siue cum ceteris consonante"<sup>19</sup>.

Just before saying this Augustine has noticed that the evangelists were thought to have written their works in the order Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Since in the passage just quoted he states that each evangelist knew "the other one, namely the one preceding him", in the singular, Augustine might seem to mean that Matthew was known to Mark, Mark to Luke, and Luke to John. But in reality Augustine does not speak here about literary dependencies. What he argues is:

- (1) that the order in which each evangelist arranged his material differs from the order followed in the other Gospels; but,
- (2) that it must not be taken as an indication of ignorance if an

19. AUGUSTINUS, *De consensu evangelistarum*, I,ii,4 (WEHRICH, ed., p. 4).

evangelist arranged his Gospel in another order than the other evangelists, nor if one evangelist in composing his Gospel did not include in it all the material occurring in the other Gospels. For all evangelists could dispose of the same amount of knowledge about Jesus. One evangelist may have related less than another, yet none of the evangelists can be approached with ignorance or lack of information, for all had the same knowledge;

(3) that both in order and in content, Mark has so much more in common with Matthew than with Luke or John that "he seems to have followed Matthew at his heels like his shield-bearer", or like his attendant, or his page, and to have made an abridged version of Matthew's Gospel.

Now there are two points in this exposé at which Augustine *seems* to allude to something like literary dependence between the Gospels.

Firstly, when he argues that an evangelist who failed to relate everything that his predecessor wrote, must not for that reason be regarded as ignorant of the contents of that predecessor's Gospel. But here Augustine does not mean to refer to literary relationships between the Gospels. He is defending each individual evangelist against the possible blame of lack of information. The sentence reflects the apologetic purpose of *De consensu evangelistarum* as a whole.

Secondly, there is the passage in which Augustine says that Mark "looks like having followed Matthew at his heels (*subsequutus ... videtur*)" and abridged the latter's Gospel. But here the verb *subsequi* has no more a technical, literary-critical meaning than *praetermittere* and *interponere* etc. in the passages quoted above and elsewhere in *De consensu evangelistarum*. What Augustine means by *subsequi* becomes clear from his comparison of Mark with the three other evangelists: Mark has nothing in common with John alone; he has very little which is not found in the other Gospels; he has still less in common with Luke alone; but he has very much in common with Matthew, even verbally. On the basis of this purely quantitative comparison Augustine concluded that "Mark looks like having followed Matthew at his heels". Even if we do not stress the nuance of uncertainty or irreality which the verb *videtur* may be supposed to have here, it should be observed that "following" (*subsequi*) in this context obviously has to convey the idea of "having very much in common (with another writer on the same subject)", rather than the idea of "editing" in a literary-critical or redaction-critical sense.

Moreover, the expression "to follow like a shield-bearer" in the present context is figurative language anyhow. The verb "to follow" belongs to the imagery; it can be taken in a more or less literal sense only within the framework of the imagery, not on the level of the reality of Mark's literary activity. The image is that of a shield-bearer accom-

panying a soldier: the two men march on together, side by side. This image does not precisely evoke the notion of someone writing a book by revising and editing someone else's book; rather it evokes the idea of two people going in the same direction, but independently.

All in all, then, Augustine does not mean to say more than that, both in content and order, Mark's Gospel resembles much more that of Matthew than those of Luke and John, and that, since Mark is much shorter than Matthew, Mark looks like an abridgement of Matthew, without being dependent on Matthew at that. In so far as Augustine found that Mark resembled Matthew, he could say that Mark "followed" Matthew, especially since he regarded Matthew as older than Mark.

One final question deserves to be dealt with here. If the evangelists did not derive their knowledge about Jesus' ministry from each other, how then did they come by their information? The answer is: (1) from their own experience as eyewitnesses; this applies to Matthew and John; (2) from reliable tradition handed down by eyewitnesses; this applies to Mark and Luke, and to a certain extent also to Matthew and John; (3) by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; this applies to all four evangelists. The result was that, according to Augustine, each of the four evangelists had access to exactly the same amount of information about Jesus' words and deeds. It is on this common reservoir of information that, under the guidance of the Spirit, each evangelist individually drew the stories and sayings of Jesus that he recorded in his Gospel. Since in principle each evangelist could dispose of precisely the same information as any other evangelist, it was meaningful for Augustine to state that an evangelist had "left out" something which another evangelist had included, even if the former had not used the latter's Gospel as his source. The idea was that the evangelist who had left something unnoticed, had failed to transmit something which the reservoir of information, available to all the evangelists, had enabled him to transmit.

### Conclusion

Recently Christopher Tuckett has argued that after I,ii,4 Augustine is no longer concerned about the literary relationships between the evangelists<sup>20</sup>. It can be added now that Augustine was not concerned about the literary relationships between the evangelists in I,ii,4 either<sup>21</sup>.

20 C M TUCKETT, *Response to the Two-Gospel Hypothesis*, in *The Interrelations of the Gospels* (n 1 above), pp 47-76, especially p 51, note 15

21 This conclusion seems to confirm the conclusions reached by H MERKEL, *Die Überlieferung der alten Kirche über das Verhältnis der Evangelien*, in DUNGAN, *The Interrelationships* (see n 20 above), pp 566-590, especially p 589 "Bei den Kirchenvatern herrscht die Auffassung vor, die Evangelien gingen unmittelbar oder mittelbar auf



Augustine had no "Benutzungshypothese" at all. The so-called "Augustinian hypothesis" does not reflect Augustine's views on the origin and interrelations of the Gospels. It is a recent invention, possibly not older than the sixteenth century<sup>22</sup>.

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Augenzeugen zurück. An eine literarische Beziehung zwischen den Evangelien dachte man in der Alten Kirche nur in Ausnahmefällen, und dann stehen dogmatische Erwägungen im Hintergrund. So sollte sich keine moderne 'Benutzungshypothese' auf die Kirchenväter berufen".

22. So far as I know the first author to ascribe the "Augustinian hypothesis" concerning the relationships between the Gospels to Augustine was M. CHEMNITZ, *Harmonia evangelica*, <sup>1</sup>1593; Frankfurt-Hamburg, <sup>2</sup>1652, "Prolegomena", cap. I, p. 3: "Et manifestius hoc inde colligitur, cum, juxta Epiphani et Augustini sententiam, inter evangelistas illi, qui post alios scripserunt, priorum scripta et viderint et legerint". For other sixteenth-century authors who held the so-called "Augustinian hypothesis" without ascribing it explicitly to Augustine, see H.J. DE JONGE, *The Loss of Faith* (n. 3 above), especially footnotes 23-27.

[Editor's note: I can mention here a STL thesis written under F. Neirynck in 1963(!) by S. McLoughlin, *An Approach to the Synoptic Problem*, which includes an excursus on "Augustine" (pp. 25-31). I quote: "Saint Augustine is frequently cited as an authority for the system of mutual dependence in the canonical order. Da Fonseca has however conclusively shown that such an affirmation is quite unfounded" (p. 25). Many references are given (cf. above), and the conclusion is that "Augustine definitely seems to suppose independent knowledge on the part of the four evangelists" (p. 28): "the evangelists had their own information and did not depend on each other for it" (p. 29). On the *pedissequus*: "The explanation is probably of this sort. Augustine speaks of Mk following Mt, and while in our scientifically minded age such a suggestion carries causal implications, it is much less certain that it does so for the Platonic-minded Augustine: a second witness, who adds nothing to what the first and principal witness had already said, could well in such a mentality be described as his follower" (p. 28). F.V.S.]